

Memoirs of Himself.

avow their opinions to be more firmly established by the strongest objections of the opponent.

It would be easy to enlarge without end on the influences of the surrounding world in forming the character of each individual. Yet while there is no denying that such influences are effectively operating, a man may be unwilling to allow that he has been quite so servilely passive as he would probably find that he has been, if it were possible for him to make a complete examination. He may be disposed to think that his reason has been an independent power, has kept a strict watch, and passed a right judgment on his moral progress, has met the circumstances of the external world on terms of examination and authority, and has *permitted* only such impressions to be received, or at least only such consequences to follow from them, as it wisely approved. But I would tell him, that he has been a very extraordinary man, if the greater part of his time has not been spent entirely without a thought of reflecting what impressions were made on him, or what their tendency might be; and even without a consciousness that the effect of any impressions was of importance to his moral habits. He may be assured that he has been subjected to many gentle, gradual processes, and has met many critical occasions, on which, and on the consequences of which to himself, he exercised no attention or opinion. And again, it is unfortunately true, that even should attention be awake, and opinions be formed, the faculty which forms them is very servile to the other parts of the human constitution. If it could be extrinsic to the man, a kind of domestic Pythia, or an attendant genius, like the demon of Socrates/* it might then be a dignified regulator of the influences which are acting on his character, to decide what should or should not be permitted to affect him, and in what manner; though even then its disapproving dictates might fail against some extremely powerful impression which might give a temporary bias, and such repetitions of that impression as should confirm it. But the case is, that this faculty, though mocked with imperial names, being condemned to dwell in the company of far more active

* Socrates was under the belief that a divine voice (afterwards spoken of as his *Desman* or *Genius*) habitually interfered to restrain certain actions